

FOOD4SUSTAINABILITY

Collective action for sustainable food systems in a changing climate: assessing social experimentations and policy innovations

DURATION
1/10/2013 - 31/12/2017

BUDGET
749.664 €

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Context

The agro-food system increasingly puts pressure on natural resources, and accounts for 19-29% of greenhouse gas emissions by humans. A reform of the agro-food system towards greater sustainability and resource efficiency is essential and increasingly demanded by civil society. While focus on increasing production remains, more emphasis is put on other qualities of the food system: nutritional quality, environmental impacts and equity issues. This has led to the emergence of local initiatives for transition to sustainable food systems that encounter some obstacles: the need for collective action strategies and social rules when dealing with collective goods; the fragmentation and limited scope of many initiatives. Therefore, institutions are needed to organise transition pathways on a larger scale. An integrated approach is needed that links pioneering consumer and producer initiatives to all actors of the food system, scaling up the initiatives and generating impact and transition of the system.

General objectives and underlying research questions

- (1) The project will conduct a comparative analysis of the collective processes and actor's motivations in transition pathways to a sustainable agro-food system in Belgium in order to (a) identify the most relevant collective processes; (b) look into the trajectories over time (emergence, success and failure) to better understand the role played by extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, and the major barriers and success factors of the initiatives; (c) identify the institutional mechanisms helping concerned actors overcome such obstacles;
- (2) Analyse, develop and evaluate a set of policy tools that would promote these collective processes and put them on a sound legal and institutional basis.

Methodology: 5 steps

1. Review of literature and review of legal and policy frameworks applicable to sustainable food systems
2. Mapping of existing collective processes in transition pathways. Interviews along 4 parameters: motivation; organisational structure; collective action rules; role of public agencies
3. In depth analysis of organisational principles in successful governance of transition pathways governing collective processes in market transactions and in governmental incentive / regulatory schemes. Facilitative roadmaps for all actors concerned.
4. Across steps 1 to 3, two transversal processes: (1) transdisciplinary stakeholder interface through 3 'social actors workshops' and (2) problem framing through meetings with experts.
5. Conclusions and recommendations.

Nature of the interdisciplinarity

The project is a collaboration between 3 universities the UCL, KU Leuven, ULB. The research team includes economists, legal and social scientists, philosophers and agronomists.



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Potential impact of the research on science, society and/or on decision-making

This research is not essentially prescriptive: it is facilitative. It seeks to link the failures and successes of social innovations to specific institutional mechanisms and motivations of actors. Beyond the dominant approaches attributing successes and failures to the wrong "external" incentives, it will instead take into account the diversity of motivations of actors that cannot be reduced to their economic incentives.

Description of finished products of research (model, scenario, report, workshop, publication, etc ...) at short and medium term

Year 1: 'Positioning Food4sustainability'

1. Overview of existing policies on low carbon and energy efficient food production, distribution and consumption and of relevant legal and policy frameworks in Belgium and the EU applicable to food systems;
2. Multi-stakeholder workshop1 on challenges and diagnosis of success and failures

Year 2-3: 'Driving forces of Food4sustainability'

1. Mapping of collective processes in transition pathways in different types of food chains
2. Results of the interviews on actors' motivations in collective process for transition
3. Multi-stakeholder workshop 2 on the identification of the most promising initiatives

Year 3: 'Food4Sustainability best practice governance principles'

1. Literature review on governance of collective practices
2. Results of the analysis of the commonalities and differences on "best practice governance principles" within the existing collective processes analysed through the interviews

Year 4/1: 'Designing Food4Sustainability'

Design documents with a proposition based (1) on 2 major types of market-related collective arrangements (on participatory certification systems and industry wide codes of conduct) and (2) on 2 major types of government related collective arrangements (alternative currency systems and allocation of incentives/subsidies to collectivities)

Year 4 /2: 'Food4Sustainability Roadmaps for transition',

1. Synthesis of the main conclusions: Roadmaps for transition
2. Multi-stakeholders Workshop 3 and Report

Year 5: 'Food4Sustainability conclusions and recommendations'

1. Synthesis the analysis of governance architectures and options proposed in the roadmap
2. Synthesis of the overall project findings
3. Some recommendations or guidelines for defining efficient policies and measures

CONTACT INFORMATION

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LINKS

<http://www.food4sustainability.be/>